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The concern here is with kinds of cognitive structures individuals use in making major life choices upon which subsequent development depends. The system conceptualized for describing these psychological processes, pictures each choice domain (such as occupations) as a set of concentric squares. The outermost square deals with total knowledge of the individual in regard to the domain; the second, with what is possible as a choice; and the inner square with what is chosen. A coordinated series of studies was carried out using 144 male and female adolescents in three countries. United States, Netherlands, and India. The purpose was to discover: (1) what aspects of the developing person's environment are related to the variables of such a system, and (2) how are the variables in different parts of the system related to each other. Assessment techniques used were: (1) a values Q-sort, (2) a free listing technique, and (3) a choice pattern procedure. Data on two choice domains, occupations and free-time activities, are discussed in terms of the above research objectives. (PS)

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PERSONAL VIEWS OF POSSIBILITIES IN THREE CULTURES

Leona E. Tyler

The context of our thinking about the research undertaking I am reporting is a search for a theoretical orientation from which to approach the study of psychological individuality. What has been taking shape in our research group is a general theory of possibilities. The central idea is multipotentiality. Repeatedly, as development progresses, a few possibilities are selected to be actualized; a large number of others are relegated to the realm of what might have been. This selective process occurs in many ways, but at least a part of it is in the person's own hands. He chooses some possibilities to be realized and rules out others.

I believe that social, economic, and technological trends during our era are increasing the importance of personal choice, as over against other selective factors, in the developmental process. Therefore, it is imperative that we come to understand it if we hope to maximize our knowledge about human beings and our helpfulness to them. Phrased in the most general way, the research question in which we are interested is: What kinds of cognitive structures or concepts do individuals employ in making the major life choices upon which subsequent development depends? How does a person choose what he will become?

Kinds of Variables.

Our concepts about these concepts have grown out of the thinking we did as we went along, as we pondered and discussed the things our research subjects told us. The most meaningful system we have evolved for keeping in mind the psychological processes in which we are interested pictures each choice domain, such as choice of a career, choice of leisure activities, or choice of friends, as a set of concentric squares. See Figure 1.

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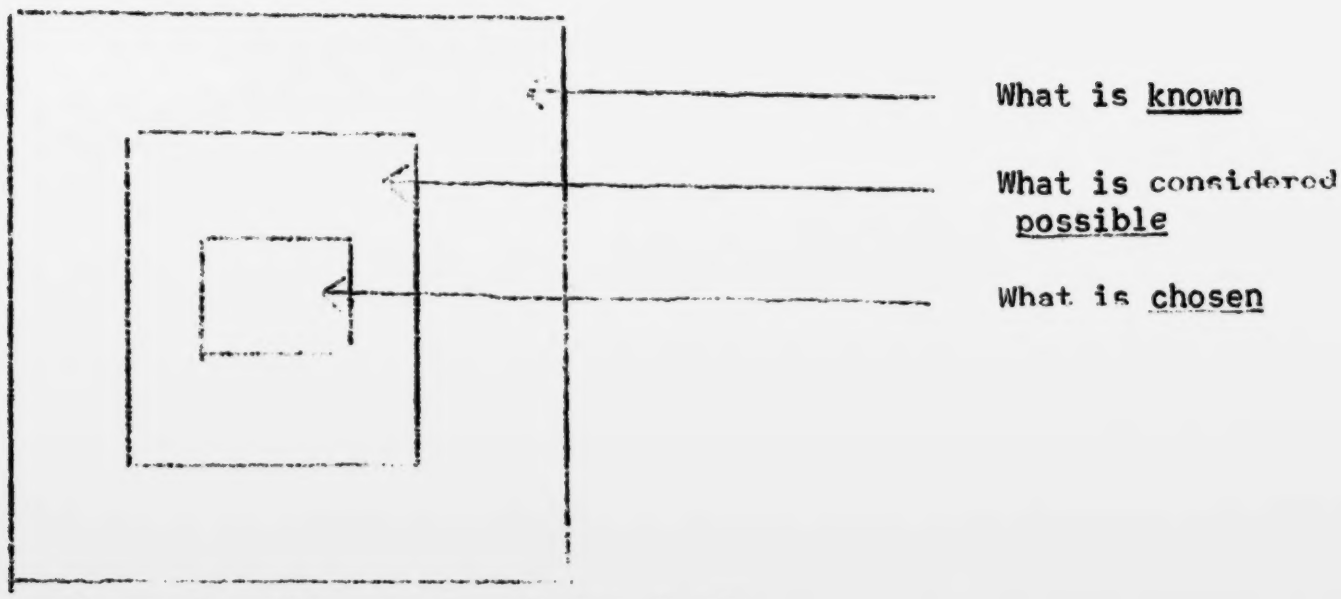

Figure 1. Diagram of a choice domain.

For each of these areas, some of the variables related to life choices can be specified. First, not shown in the diagram, outside of the outermost square, in the general "life space" of the individual, there are some basic assumptions, beliefs, and values. It is these general orientations that determine what the person considers to be the major areas requiring life choices and how much importance he attaches to his own choices within each of these domains. For example, while most boys assume that work is a major area of life, and thus are likely to have well-developed choice structures in this domain, many girls do not make this assumption and may develop more elaborate cognitive structures in other choice domains, such as that of social relationships.

For each separate domain, such as career choice, the area of the outermost square represents the total knowledge of the individual with regard to the domain. For example, how many occupations does a given individual have any familiarity with at all? He cannot do any thinking about things that are totally outside his experience. Other variables that may be important but that we have not studied so far are the sources of the information the individual possesses--(personal experience, reading, observation, etc.) and the accuracy or correctness of his information.

The next kind of variable to which this conceptualization points consists of whatever individuals use as bases for distinguishing between what is and what is not a <u>personal</u> possibility. What are the conceptual structures that operate as a screen around what our diagram shows as the second square? For example, out of several hundred occupations John Jones knows something about, what distinguishes the twenty he says he likes or might choose from the others?

There is another kind of variable here also. How are these personal possibilities <u>organized</u>? What <u>concepts</u> do they represent to the individual? Referring to our diagram, how is the area within the second square structured? How does the person establish priorities upon which decisions can rest?

Finally, the small inner square representing courses of action actually taken, brings in still another kind of variable. How tentative is this choice of a course of action, or, putting it in the opposite way, how much certainty or commitment does it carry? We have not explored this issue as yet.

<u>Assessment Procedures</u>.

If we had had as clear a notion of the nature of this system of related choice variables when we began our cross-cultural research project several years ago as we have now, our results would be more complete and definitive than they are. Our attempts to make sense of the results we obtained sharpened our thinking, but we are stuck with the data we have. Thus some parts of the overall system I have presented are well represented in our research project, others not. The assessment techniques we used are as follows:

1. A Values Q-sort in two parts, Personal Directions, and Personal Assumptions. (Since we have not yet related these assessments to those represented by the area within the circles, I shall not discuss these results today.)

2. Free Listing Technique.

This is a way of assessing how extensive an individual's knowledge is within a given choice domain. He is simply asked to write down as many items as he can. Time limits are set liberally enough so that the list approximates the person's total supply of available items. The data we shall present are in the two domains, Occupations and Free Time Activities.

3. Checking of Items on Free Lists.

After each subject had written down all of the occupations or free time activities he could think of, he was asked to check "the ones you see as possibilities for a person like you." This is a means of assessing the extensiveness of his possibility world.

4. Choice Pattern Procedure.

Designed specifically to get at conceptual variables, this is a sorting procedure in which the subject is presented with 50 items on separate cards (occupations or free time activties) and asked first to place on one side those he sees as possibilities and on the other side those he rejects. He is then asked to group the items, and when this has been done, to explain what it is that the items in each group have in common. Scoring procedures for quantitative aspects and coding procedures for qualitative aspects have been developed.

Research Plan.

What we have done is to conduct a coordinated series of exploratory studies focused on some of the questions we view as most important. They were designed more to stimulate and clarify our thinking about how life choices are made than to establish conclusions with reasonable certainty. Only two of these questions are considered in this paper:

1. What aspects of the developing person's environment are related to the variables in the system outlined above?

2. How are the variables in different parts of the system related to one another?

In order to explore the relationships of variables in the system to environmental characteristics (Question 1), we selected three samples of adolescents from comparable communities in three countries--the United States, the Netherlands, and India. It is possible to analyze several ways in which the environments of boys and girls in these samples differ: 1. extensiveness of environmental possibilities open to individuals; 2. amount of external structure imposed by home, school, and community; 3. cultural values and expectations. We were interested in getting leads as to the effects of each of these kinds of environmental differences on the choice structures in our system.

In order to obtain information bearing on question 2, correlations were computed between variables within the system in each separate sample.

Details with regard to the size and composition of our samples are as follows:

Number	Place	Sex	Age	Socio-Economic Groups
48	North Bend, Oregon	24 boys 24 girls	14-15	12 upper-middle 18 lower-middle 18 upper-lower
48	Enkhuizen, Netherlands	24 boys 24 girls	14-15	12 upper-middle 18 lower-middle 18 upper-lower
48	Palwal, India	24 boys 24 girls	14-15	12 upper-middle 18 lower-middle 18 upper-lower

Data have also been obtained from several supplementary samples in Oregon in order to provide checks on particular hypotheses, but these are not relevant to the present discussion.

Results.

Let us look first at the findings having to do with question 1, the effects of environmental differences on some of the variables in our choice system. Considering first the largest square representing the general extensiveness of the individual's knowledge in particular choice domains, we turn to evidence from the free listing of occupations and free time activities. The averages are as follows:

	India		Dutch		American	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Occupations	25.8	18.8	34.5	36.2	21.5	22.2
Free time activities	17.9	17.5	21.5	20.8	24.3	26.5

The differences between nationality groups turned out to be significant at the .05 level for both sexes and for both choice domains. The Indian group is lowest for both, suggesting that the external restrictions on individual choices characteristic of a "developing" country affect the "knowledge" aspect of the thinking underlying choices. The fact, however, that the Dutch group knows the most occupations, and the American group knows the most free time activities suggests that some other social or cultural factors also affect people's thinking. Supplementary studies consistently showed this high American awareness of leisure and recreation.

Turning now to the second square of our diagram, representing the set of things an individual sees as possible for him, we look at the numbers of occupations and free time activities persons in our three samples checked on the lists they had written.

	Indian Sample		Dutch Sample		American Sample	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Occupations	6.2	3.7	5.2	4.2	5.2	4.7
Free time activities	8.2	8.3	11.6	11.2	14.6	15.3

Results for this variable differ in several ways from those obtained for the "outer square" variable. The three nationality groups do not differ significantly in the number of occupations they check. For free time activities, however, American boys and girls again are significantly high on this possibility variable, and the Indians significantly low.

Next let us consider differences in the conceptual structures individuals in the three settings employ. We coded what the subjects told us were the reasons for grouping job titles or free time activities together in the choice pattern procedure and looked for differences in the frequencies of use of various categories in the three settings. The categories for occupations referred to intrinsic features of work tasks, such as creativity, service to others, responsibility, variety, etc., extrinsic features, such as prestige, salary, etc., and feasibility considerations, such as appraisal of one's own ability or personality characteristics. The categories coded for free time activities similarly included intrinsic and extrinsic features, as well as self-appraisal. The results are too detailed to be reported completely here, but they can be summarized as follows: a. Indians use the smallest number of different categories to account for their groupings of both sorts of choice items. b. for occupations, the American group has the most highly differentiated set of concepts. For free time activities, it is the Dutch who show the highest degree of differentiation.

Of the many differences on particular coding categories, the most interesting to us were those on self-appraisal variables ("I am good at things like this," "I don't have the patience for teaching," etc.). The following table indicates the number of individuals in each of the sex and nationality groups making this sort of response.

	India		Netherlands		United States	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Occupations	4	2	18	9	14	15
Free time activities	0	0	5	5	4	1

Indian boys and girls seldom accounted for their groupings in this way. American girls used such concepts more frequently than Dutch girls did to account for groupings of occupational titles, but Dutch girls used them more in connection with free time activities. (Although the numbers are small, most of the differences are significant.) The general conclusion we reached, at least tentatively, is that the degree of environmental or situational structure is inversely related to the amount of cognitive structuring individuals do.

Now let us look at data we have on the second research question--the relationship of variables in different parts of the system to each other.

We are interested in two principal kinds of questions here: 1. Do individuals tend to use the same organizing principles in dealing with different choice domains? 2. Do individuals tend to organize the known (large square in diagram) in the same way as they organize the smaller area of the possible?

To relate the sizes of the two choice domains, Occupations and Free Time Activities, we computed correlations in each of our six subsamples (3 countries, 2 sexes) with the results shown in the following table:

	India		Netherlands		United States	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
The "known" (Occupations vs. free time activities listed)	.74	.34	.62	.52	.80	.26
The "possible" (Occupations vs. free time activities checked)	.49	.26	.32	.41	.44	.50

It would appear that individual differences in extensiveness (number of items that can be listed) are common to both domains, although the relationship is closer for boys than for girls.

The same can be said for individual differences in the extensiveness of what is considered possible (number of items checked in free lists). In all groups, these correlations between numbers of occupational possibilities and numbers of free time possibilities are positive, and only three out of 12 r's fail to reach at least the .05 level of significance. They do, however, run a little lower than the correlations representing the total set of what is known.

The relationships within each of the choice domains (occupations and free time activities) between knowledge variables and possibility variables present a more complex picture, different for the two choice domains. For occupations, there is no evidence of a relationship between the number listed and the number checked. The fact that a person knows a lot of occupations does not mean that he will consider many of them to be possibilities for himself. But for free time activities, these correlations are all positive, and most of them are fairly high. The more kinds of recreational pursuits a person is familiar with, the larger the number which he is likely to consider as activities in which he might engage.

An analysis of the qualitative data, the coded categories subjects use in accounting for their groupings in the choice pattern procedure, also indicates that the concepts people use in thinking about which of their possibilities to rule out differ in many respects from the concepts they use to organize those from which they make positive choices. For example, what we have called extrinsic variables, such as status, salary, security, etc., are seldom mentioned to characterize groups of occupations subjects classify as personal possibilities,

but appear with considerable frequency as reasons for rejecting some kinds of occupations. At least at this stage of life, boys and girls seldom express a preference for a group of occupations because they are all clean, but they may explain the rejection of a group of occupations because they are dirty. To take another example from the domain of free time activities, a person is not likely to link together a set of things he chooses by citing sex appropriateness, but he may account for a set of things he rules out by referring to their inappropriateness for his sex.

However, the one kind of content variable singled out above is used with about equal frequency to account for choices and for rejections. Persons who give self-appraisal responses in accounting for their groupings of occupations or free time activities, show self-appraisal thinking on both the positive and the negative sides.

Implications.

These soundings we have taken in our data pool have shown us that the cognitive structure underlying an individual's choices in important areas of life is a highly complex affair. Each part of it will have to be studied separately. Each choice domain--occupation, leisure activities, companions and associates, attitudes and ideologies, and others--is organized differently from the others. Choice structures develop differently in different societies and cultures. We did not come out with any kind of types, broad cognitive styles, or "ways to live" that would facilitate our planning for subsequent research.

Yet our search for structure in the thinking underlying choices has suggested that there is order here. Eventually I would hope that we could develop systematic procedures for assessing in each individual case the size and shape of the possibility world in which the person sets the course of his life, and for

bringing about planned changes in parts of the system. Until we have such a technology, counselors are to a considerable extent working in the dark. For example, it is probably futile to expect an uneducated boy from a poor neighborhood to make a wise choice of a job training program if his knowledge of the occupational world is limited and largely incorrect, or if he has no concepts on the basis of which he can decide which of the kinds of work he is aware of are really possible for him. There has been a great deal of sound experimental research in psychology on the act of choice itself (represented by the small inner square in our diagram), research in which the experimenter provides the alternatives. What we have not studied until now is how the individual facing major life choices finds his options. This is the problem we have been trying to attack. We think that we have at least made a beginning.

(Paper prepared for APA Symposium, The Structure of Individual Choice, September 1, 1968)